



LEADERS TO LEADERS CONFERENCE

Executive Summary

2006 CDC Leaders to Leaders Conference: Engaging the Power of Partnerships

On March 29, 2006, leaders from CDC and partnership organizations convened at the CDC Tom Harkin Global Communications Center for the 2006 CDC *Leaders to Leaders Conference: Engaging the Power of Partnerships*. The conference made great strides toward improving two-way communication with partners and enhancing collaboration on the new Health Protection Goals.

Leaders of partner organizations helped set the agenda and goals for the conference. This collaborative effort was underscored by the conference theme, "We are listening." Included in the plenary session was a partnership panel during which representatives from the Healthy Homes partner engagement group discussed how they worked with CDC on the Healthy Homes goal, one of CDC's Health Protection Goals. An overview of CDC's partner and goal strategy was also presented.

Partners were grouped into morning and afternoon breakout sessions. Partner leaders chaired each of the sessions and were joined at the table by a senior CDC leader, a CDC goal team leader, and a professional facilitator. The morning sessions focused on partner participation in goals action plan development. Specifically, partners were asked to discuss stages, processes and timelines for goals action planning and to recommend ways to collaborate on goals action planning. The afternoon breakout session focused on improving two-way communication. Partners were asked to generate recommendations of ways to improve communication between CDC and its partners, as well as among partners themselves.

Both breakout sessions were followed by plenary sessions, during which the partner chairs reported back on each group's findings and recommendations. Several themes and observations were identified.

Overall Themes

- Partners want CDC to provide specific direction and guidance to partners in working with CDC, as well as greater clarity about collaborating on the Health Protection Goals.
- The conference provided partners with an opportunity to network with each other. CDC can assist by continuing to support and develop opportunities for improved communication among partners.
- Next steps are significant. Partners want to know what CDC will do with the feedback collected at the conference.

Communication

- Better systems and processes are needed for sharing information in a clear and timely manner (e.g. teleconferences, listservs, blogs, e-newsletters).
- Linking partners to information sources at CDC can be improved by increasing partner access to CDC points of contact.
- Frequent communication increases trust in CDC. Communication of science is CDC's greatest asset and needs to be vigorously protected. However, communication is not always relayed soon enough to partners to give them time to respond effectively or early enough in the process.

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Goal Action Planning

- Shared visions and mutual goals are critical to the success of the country's public health mission. At this point, more clarity is sought on the Health Protection Goals so partners can invest in them.
- CDC should solicit more information on partners' goals and priorities before it engages partners.
- Partners need a clearer understanding of the return on their investment in goals action planning. The effort must be worthwhile and meaningful, and must be closely aligned with partner priorities in order to receive the most support.
- Committed, passionate leadership is critical to successful collaborations. More non-traditional partners should be invited to the table. All partners need to be held accountable and share the risks associated with goals development and implementation.
- Partner roles and responsible need further clarification; their investment in time and resources should be realistic.

The groups' priorities and ideas shared during the conference will be critical in creating a more effective and dynamic network of partnerships. CDC Director Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH, concluded the meeting with several key observations:

- CDC is highly valued and supported by our partners.
- Partners--both traditional and new, non-traditional partners--bring enormous value to the goal planning process, to CDC, and to each other.
- Partners support the concept of goals and "intelligent measures" and want to participate early in the action planning stages.
- Partners expect (and deserve) a return on their investment, and want regular updates on our progress toward achieving goals.
- CDC can take many steps to support and sustain successful partnerships. Key focus areas include developing identified points of contact, reducing barriers to finding people at CDC, using more channels of communication, communicating earlier and allowing more time for input and response, maintaining a consistent single message, and above all, assuring that science remains the foundation of CDC's work.

CDC leadership is reviewing partner input to develop specific actions and will continue to solicit feedback from partners. "This is not the end of the story but rather the beginning," said Dr. Gerberding at the conference closing. "What we heard today confirms how much capacity our partners have and how they provide assets that CDC could never develop. Partners truly add value and are eager to do so in the context of Health Protection Goals."

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